



Media release

Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships The Honourable Curtis Pitt

Biodiversity offsets prove big business for Indigenous community

Three Australian resource companies have signed a multi-million dollar deal to see Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council manage more than 500 hectares of threatened Brigalow Belt land as Biodiversity Offsets.

Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Curtis Pitt said he hoped the innovative arrangement between Cockatoo Coal, BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance, BHP Billiton Mitsui and Woorabinda Council would become a template for others to follow.

"This deal is a win for everyone involved, delivering on environmental protections, supporting long-term job opportunities for locals and providing for the development of this great Indigenous community," Mr Pitt said.

"The ancient custodians of this land now have an opportunity to protect our unique environments and strengthen their connection to country, while also developing skills for work.

According to the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, projects that significantly impact the environment must provide environmental offsets to protect species and ecosystems that are unavoidably impacted by their operations.

The agreement requires the rehabilitation of strategic land parcels, which will involve significant fencing to manage Woorabinda Pastoral Company's 7500 head of cattle.

Woorabinda Mayor, Councillor Terry Munns said the funds would also allow for the immediate appointment of rangers to undertake a technical analysis of the land's biodiversity and track environmental conditions like rainfall and temperatures.

"That's the first step, in the long term we want to skill up locals to manage this land rather than bringing in outside experts so that we don't want to lose sight of the vision, values and culture of our community," Cr Munns said.

"This Agreement helps us with jobs while looking after our land and some very rare species of plants and animals so I'm proud to be part of this initiative".

The 547 hectares designated as a biodiversity offset area has been agreed to by both the Commonwealth and Queensland Departments of Environment.

Cockatoo Coal Ltd chief executive officer Peter Kane said his company wanted to protect the natural environment and provide long-term economic benefits.

"This arrangement proves there needn't be conflict between the objectives of delivering environmental protection and creating economic benefit," said Mr Kane.

"Our Baralaba Mine in Central Queensland has created employment opportunities through work extracting raw materials for steel production and will continue to provide jobs beyond the mine's working life, with Woorabinda locals to be employed preserving the natural biodiversity of their region on the Zamia Creek property."

BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance asset president Rag Udd said the deal would offset the company's Caval Ridge Mine.

"Not only will our arrangement with WASC provide best practice conservation of the area at Stoney Creek for future generations, it will also provide an environmental offset for work at our Caval Ridge coal mine," he said.

BHP Billiton Mitsui asset president James Palmer said working with council over the past nine months had been genuinely collaborative.

"Our thanks go to the Woorabinda community for their input and being willing to work with us on a concept that was a little outside the box," Mr Palmer said.

"We hope this project model will be developed in other regions of Queensland and Australia as a way to generate wealth and share the social benefits that come with that economic opportunity, while also keeping the environment front of mind."

Earthtrade helped broker the deal between BHP, Cockatoo Coal and Woorabinda Council as a specialist in delivering offset solutions.

Chairman David Nilon said this was a pioneering approach to biodiversity offsets that would provide for the protection of species that rely on the Brigalow Belt's ecology.

"That includes the ornamental snake, the vulnerable squatter pigeon, vulnerable long-eared bat, endangered solanum species of plant and Brigalow ecology" said Mr Nilon.

"This project demonstrates that not only are environmental outcomes possible, but that triple bottom line impacts of economic, social and environmental outcomes are entirely achievable."

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